

Filed for intro on 02/15/2001
SENATE BILL 1905 By
Wilder

HOUSE BILL 1932
By Fitzhugh

AN ACT to provide for the erection of directional signs for Historic LaGrange on Interstate Highway 40 in Fayette County.

WHEREAS, it is the policy of this General Assembly to commemorate significant eras and events in this state's panoramic history; and

WHEREAS, the fascinating history of the Town of LaGrange in Fayette County should be preserved and disseminated for the edification and appreciation of present and future generations; and

WHEREAS, LaGrange is a stately plantation village with the style and elegance of yesteryear that are unique to West Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, LaGrange first came into being as an Indian village called "Itey uch la," meaning "Cluster of Pines"; and

WHEREAS, LaGrange was named in honor of the Marquis de LaFayette's ancestral estate in Auvergne, France. Fayette County was also named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, by 1824, the Town of LaGrange was a thriving settlement; the town lots were laid out in 1825 by the county's first sheriff, Samuel Harper; using Philadelphia as a pattern, the plan called for the streets to be lined with locust, elm, and mulberry trees; and

WHEREAS, by 1825, LaGrange was a flourishing cotton market, surpassing Memphis as the dominant town in the southwestern part of the state; LaGrange became renowned as a center of culture, society and education; and

WHEREAS, during its heyday as a prosperous market town in the antebellum South, LaGrange was served by three newspapers, two hotels and a vast array of bustling shops, stores, service industries, and even a brass band; Town Hall was used for performances by local dramatic groups and visiting troupes, and Medieval reenactments were held; and

WHEREAS, one of the first settlers to LaGrange was Major Charles Michie, a veteran of The War of 1812; he built as his magnificent home "Woodlawn," which still stands today at the eastern part of town; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Mary Hayes Gloster, a widow from North Carolina, was greatly disturbed by the lack of an Episcopal Church upon her arrival in LaGrange; and

WHEREAS, through her hard work and dedication, the Immanuel Episcopal Church was organized in 1832, and the present church building was completed in 1843; now completely restored, Immanuel Episcopal Church still holds services every Sunday and hosts an Annual Harvest Eucharist on the second Sunday of each October; and

WHEREAS, other notable citizens hailing from LaGrange include John L.T. Sneed, who served as a Tennessee Supreme Court Justice; William Milliken, author and compiler of the *Code of Tennessee Laws*; and Miss Mary Alice Beasley, 1941 Maid of Cotton for Memphis' Cotton Festival; and

WHEREAS, LaGrange is the birthplace of Lucy Holcombe Pickens, the "Queen of the Confederacy"; she spent her childhood there and married Francis W. Pickens in 1858, shortly before he began his service as U.S. Minister to Russia; she would become close friends with Czar Alexander II; and

WHEREAS, Lucy Holcombe Pickens' portrait was placed on the one dollar Confederate note while her husband was serving as Governor of the Confederate State of South Carolina;

her portrait was also placed on three different one hundred dollar Confederate notes; she was the only woman to be so honored by the Confederate States; and

WHEREAS, on June 13, 1862, LaGrange was occupied by Union troops who held possession of the town until the close of the war; situated on a high bluff and served by rail, LaGrange was a natural military outpost; and

WHEREAS, Major Michie's home, "Woodlawn," was used as the West Tennessee headquarters for General William T. Sherman and also served for several months as an emergency hospital; and

WHEREAS, Hancock Hall, the Pulliam family's home, was also occupied and General U.S. Grant stayed there during the time that General S.A. Hurlburt was in command at LaGrange; and

WHEREAS, the Civil War left LaGrange and the surrounding countryside in chaos; residents claimed that more than 45 homes were destroyed in late 1863 and that only 5 of 50 plantations along the road from LaGrange to Holly Springs, Mississippi were still occupied at the time; and

WHEREAS, disaster once again struck LaGrange on November 23, 1900, when a tornado destroyed the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches and a good part of the business district; the Methodist Church was rebuilt only to be destroyed by a second tornado in 1926; rebuilt for a third time, the building now stands along State Route 57; and

WHEREAS, despite the Civil War, natural disasters and other periods of turbulence and tribulation, many of the town's fine homes, churches and other historic buildings have survived and still stand today as reminders of LaGrange's glorious past; and

WHEREAS, on April 14, 1975, the citizens of LaGrange elected for their fair city to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places in an effort to protect the town from change that would drastically alter its character; LaGrange is one of only two Tennessee cities that have merited inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, since that fateful day, the citizens of LaGrange have worked with purpose and commitment to uphold their solemn pledge "to protect, preserve, improve, develop and perpetuate our town to the greatest extent humanly possible"; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly should take all prudent measures to assist the citizens of LaGrange in preserving their town's magnificent past and rich heritage and promoting its illustrious history for the enjoyment of all Tennesseans and visitors to our great state; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the department of transportation is hereby directed to erect and maintain directional signs for the Town of LaGrange on Interstate Highway 40 at Exit 35 (State Route 59), both eastbound and westbound, in Fayette County. In addition to directional language and symbols, such signs shall bear the words "Historic LaGrange."

SECTION 2. The erection of such directional signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 3. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2001, the public welfare requiring it.